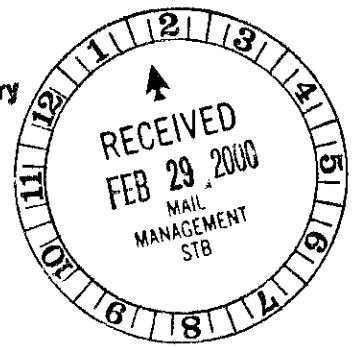


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**My name is Jimmy Heidel and I am Executive Director of the Vicksburg and Warren County Economic Development Foundation. I formerly served as the Executive Director of the Mississippi Department of Economic and Community Development.**

**I have spent my entire career in promoting economic development in the State of Mississippi. I have learned a great many things about economic development and one of the most important things I've learned is that you need a strong railroad system to have a strong economic development program. That system has to be efficient, it has to be competitive and it has to have significant reach. More recently, I've learned another lesson that is**

**becoming increasingly important – that is, that trade between the United States, Canada and Mexico is becoming a tremendous engine for economic growth and that engine is fueled in part by a strong integrated transportation system.**

**While I know you do not intend this hearing to be about the BN/CN merger, I need to reference it here in connection with my main point. From an economic development point of view, last year's CN/IC merger was enormously beneficial to the shippers of Mississippi. It gave us single line service to new markets. It reduced transit times between Canada and Jackson, Mississippi by over three and one half days. In conjunction with CN's alliance with the Kansas City Southern, it put Mississippi at the center of a NAFTA railroad that will help our shippers compete in the entire North American**

**economy. It brought new investment to the state. And it did all of this smoothly with no interruption in service or other merger-related problems.**

**There are many of us in Mississippi that believe these are the downstream benefits we believe you should be considering. I have listened with sympathy here to the many shippers that have appeared during this hearing. I understand that they have been hurt by bad implementation of past mergers. But bad implementation by individual railroads should neither prevent nor delay STB consideration of the merits of the CN/BN combination. You may decide to reject the merger because you believe it is not in the public interest. But that merger, and by extension those of us that will benefit from it, deserve to have our day in court.**

**I come from a state that was hurt more than almost any other state in the nation by railroad abandonment's. For decades we lost hundred of miles of rail infrastructure because the Class I railroads felt they could not afford to invest in Mississippi. Today the railroad map is changing in ways that put Mississippi back into the economic action. This is a turn around situation for our state, and I hope the federal government, through the STB process will allow us to make the case for continuing that turn around.**

**I appreciate the opportunity to give you my views on this matter.**